

HOUSE BILL 1999
By Hawk

AN ACT to enact the "Virtual Public Schools Act" and to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, relative to virtual schools.

WHEREAS, meeting the educational needs of children in Tennessee's schools is of the greatest importance to the future welfare of the state; and

WHEREAS, closing the achievement gap between high-performing students, including the gap between minority and non-minority students, and between economically disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers, is a significant and present challenge; and

WHEREAS, providing a broader range of educational options to parents and utilizing existing resources, along with technology, may help students in Tennessee improve their academic achievement; and

WHEREAS, many school districts currently lack the capacity to provide other public school choices for students whose schools are high priority schools; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, is amended by adding Sections 2 through 11 of this act as a new, appropriately designated chapter:

SECTION 2. The title of this act is, and may be cited as the "Virtual Public Schools Act".

SECTION 3. The purpose of this chapter is to provide Tennessee families with an alternative choice to access additional educational resources in an effort to improve academic achievement.

SECTION 4. As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires:

(1) "Sponsor" means an LEA, charter school governing body as defined in § 49-13-104(3), or the department of education; and

(2) “Virtual school” means an independent public school in which the school uses technology in order to deliver a significant portion of instruction to its students via the Internet in a virtual or remote setting.

SECTION 5. A virtual school may be sponsored by an LEA or a charter school governing body or the department of education may establish a virtual school. A virtual school shall be a public school and shall be provided equitable treatment and resources as any other public school in the state.

SECTION 6. A virtual school shall provide each student enrolled in such school:

(1) Access to a sequential curriculum that meets or exceeds the curriculum standards adopted by the state board of education. Such sequential curriculum shall have an interactive program with significant online components;

(2) The same length of time for learning opportunities per academic year that is required by law for public school students, unless such school can show that a student has demonstrated mastery or completion of an appropriate subject area; and

(3) Regular assessment in language arts, math, science and social studies.

SECTION 7.

(a) A virtual school shall provide to the parent or guardian of each student enrolled:

(1) Instructional materials;

(2) Access to necessary technology such as a computer and printer; and

(3) Access to an Internet connection for use for schoolwork.

(b) A virtual school is prohibited from providing an allotment for the purchase of instructional programs or materials to a student or to a student’s parent or guardian.

Nothing in this section shall prohibit a virtual school from reimbursing a student or

student's parent or guardian for costs associated with an Internet connection for use in the virtual school program.

SECTION 8. All teachers employed by a virtual school shall have a current valid Tennessee teaching license, or shall meet the minimum requirements for licensure as defined by the state board of education.

SECTION 9. A virtual school shall maintain an administrative office within the state. Such office shall be considered its principal place of business.

SECTION 10. Any student who is eligible for enrollment in a public school in this state may enroll in a virtual school.

SECTION 11. A virtual school shall be evaluated annually by its sponsor based on the following criteria:

(1) The extent to which the school demonstrates increases in student achievement according to the goals of its authorizing contract and state academic standards; and

(2) The accountability and viability of the virtual school, as demonstrated by its academic, fiscal and operational performance.

SECTION 12. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.